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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA

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SUBJECT: JORDAN-KUWAIT WARMING TREND CONTINUES WITH VISIT OF KUWAITI PM

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) The mid-February visit to Jordan of Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah (and several other ministers) is the latest public sign of healing - at the government/royal family level, at least - of relations strained throughout the 1990s because of Kuwait's lingering ire at the GOJ's lack of support for Kuwait during the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. Improving these ties has been a priority for King Abdullah since he ascended to the throne in early 1999; Kuwait reopened its embassy in Amman soon thereafter, and in September that year the King made the first visit by a Jordanian ruler to Kuwait since the Gulf War. While the King has made several short trips to Kuwait, PM Sheikh Nasser was the most senior Kuwaiti official to come to Jordan in many years.

¶2. (C) The visit was heavily reported by Jordan's state-run news agency Petra, which highlighted the importance of the strong relationship between the King and the Amir of Kuwait in bringing the two nations closer together. On February 20, the pro-government daily al-Dustour published a long interview with PM Sheikh Nasser in which he glossed over past tensions - "relations between Kuwait and Jordan have always been characterized by trust, joint coordination, and the strength derived from the deep-rooted fraternal ties" - and highlighted Kuwaiti investments in Jordan (totaling more than USD 6.5 billion, he said), development projects, and loans. Jordan and Kuwait are also reportedly considering a debt swap whereby Jordanian debt would be lowered in exchange for Kuwaiti interest in local real estate development projects. Sheikh Nasser added that Kuwait is interested in increasing the number of Kuwaiti students at Jordanian universities currently at 2,200, and raised the possibility of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development financing several projects here.

¶3. (U) The PM's trip was followed this week by a visit of Kuwaiti parliamentarians lead by MP Marzouq al-Hebaini. Jordanian Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications Nasser Joudeh touted the high volume of Kuwaiti investments in Jordan, and said the GOJ was committed to attracting more. For its part, the Kuwaiti parliamentarians attributed the high level of investment in the Kingdom to Kuwaiti faith in the Hashemite leadership and Jordan's stability. Jordanian legislators met with the delegation, after which Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdelhadi al-Majali hailed bilateral relations, and Senate Speaker Zeid Rifa'i said Jordan valued the aid provided by Kuwait.

¶4. (SBU) The warm language used by Kuwaitis and Jordanians reflects the reality of closer economic ties between the two countries. In 2007, Jordan imported goods valued at USD 136

million from Kuwait, including manufacturing parts and materials, polyethelene, and seafood. Jordan exported produce, air-conditioning equipment, and medication to Kuwait. Total trade between the two countries increased 64 percent between 2006 and 2007, to USD 210 million. According to the Companies Controller Directorate at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, Kuwait had USD 583 million in registered capital stock at the end of 2007, second only to Iraq. The Jordan Investment Board reports Kuwait is the third-largest source of foreign investment, at 8 percent.

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